

# ABIGAIL WILLIAMS AS A FEMME FATALE IN *THE CRUCIBLE*

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In this paper, I intend to analyse the configuration of the character of Abigail Williams in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. The essay will attempt to show to which extent Abigail conforms to the stereotype of the femme fatale in her transgressions of sexuality and desire for power in the Puritan, patriarchal society of Salem. For this purpose, similarities and differences will be drawn between the character of Abigail Williams in *The Crucible* and typical femme fatales of hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir.

Much has been written about Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, but not much has been said about the role of women in this literary work. To the best of my knowledge, even less or very little has been written about Abigail Williams, one of the main characters in the play, in what regards her similarities to the femme fatale of the hard-boiled detective novel and of the American pulps of the twentieth century. It is, thus, under this light, that I wish to examine the configuration of the character of Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*, and to trace her proximity to the femme fatale of American crime fiction and film noir, that fatal woman who, by means of her sexual appeal and innocent appearance, approaches the common man and leads him to her web in order to disable him.

In order to analyse the extent to which the character of Abigail Williams conforms to the stereotype of the femme fatale through the transgression and disruption of the boundaries established by patriarchal tradition, I will first give a brief account of how the icon of the fatal woman has evolved throughout history, paying special attention to her depiction in hard-boiled detective novel and in film noir. Further on, I will offer a description of Abigail's attitude towards John Proctor throughout *The Crucible* as well as her attitude towards John's wife, Elizabeth Proctor, and explain how her behaviour towards both of them serves for a close identification of Abigail with the femme fatale of mid-twentieth century America. During this process, I will also compare Abigail

Williams to typical femme fatales of hard-boiled fiction - most of whom have later been portrayed in noir films – in order to highlight the underlying similarities between them, always, nevertheless, taking into account the differences that may exist between Abigail and these femme fatales.

The femme fatale was given her name by the French to literally depict a “disastrous woman,” an “attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately bring disaster to a man who becomes involved with her.”<sup>131</sup> The femme fatale often signifies transgression of some kind, generally sexual, always implies danger and, rather frequently, provokes death. She was later named “spider woman” and “black widow” by the Americans and has her historical background in different religious legends and mythological tales which involve female representatives such as Lilith or Pandora. From the two, the religious myth of Lilith is, probably, the most interesting one. She is often represented as the Queen of Demons and the Mother of all Succubus – something that links her to female vampires – for her refusal to submit to Adam and because of her threat of killing his sons and daughters eight and twenty days after their birth, respectively. She is also identified with the Lamiae, female demons who seduce men while they are asleep, sucking their blood and eating their flesh: “The Alien Woman is Lilith, and she is the sweetness of sin and the evil tongue. And from the lips of the Alien Woman honey flows... she can seduce men.” (Bacharach, ‘Emeq haMelekh, 102d-103a). The myth of Lilith has lately been reviewed under a positive light by feminist groups, and she is currently considered one of the first feminists in history on the basis that she defended her rights as a woman refusing to sexually submit to Adam. What other critics have highlighted, however, is the dark side of Lilith – the way in which she seduces men in order to suck their blood, eat their flesh and kill their children – a behaviour that, critics argue, makes of Lilith not one of the first feminists in history, but rather one of the first femmes fatales in history. Somehow, the old icon of the femme fatale who used men for her own purposes resurfaced during the mid-twentieth century in America. The American dream had already been smashed to pieces and men desperately tried to reinforce patriarchal authority in order to maintain the status quo that had been lost when women accessed the work force during the war years in order to replace men, who had left their homes to fight the enemy. It was then when the covers of thousands of pulp magazines and dime novels started seeing the appearance of a new icon: the image of the femme fatale. These women could be depicted holding guns, smoking cigarettes, aggressively attacking men or just posing in a seductive manner. However, all of them shared the same singular traits: a striking beauty, a dread of morals and a halo of death. The femme fatale, moreover, both in the pulps and in the hard-boiled detective novel, represented

<sup>131</sup> Thesaurus Definition.

the very epicentre of the hero's desire. She symbolised the dark side of femininity, a certain like for action and danger, and above all, the transgressive passion that constantly threatened the patriarchal tradition that the American dream was trying so hard to reinforce. The femme fatale didn't accept the role that society had designed for her, and so, her only mission in these stories was to tempt the common man – who was rather the least common man, “a complete man and a common man and an unusual man.” (Chandler, 1984) –, a figure embodied by the sleuth, who, always loyal to his personal code of honour, had to try avoiding the many temptations the femme fatale posed and to punish her to finally restore order to a society which had found corruption in the very core of its judicial system. In this way, the detective managed, at the end of the novel, not only to solve the crime, but also to restore the status quo. In Porter's words, “The private eye is temporarily excited by an attractive woman, finds himself betrayed, and ends up demonstrating his mastery over sexual temptation by rejecting, arresting or in some cases killing her.” (1981:185).

In what regards *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller first introduces Abigail Williams in Act One, where the action begins at Reverend Samuel Parris' house. Parris' ten-year-old daughter, Betty, seems to be suffering from an unknown illness which rumours attribute to the presence of witchcraft in town. Parris is the leader of the church in the theocratic community of Salem during the spring of 1692, a community in which state and religious affairs are one and the same. He is described as a “widower with no interest in children...” who “never conceived that children were anything but thankful for being permitted to walk straight, eyes slightly lowered, arms at the sides, and mouths shut until bidden to speak.” (2003:3). In this context, Abigail is presented, as soon as she appears on stage, as a “striking beautiful girl, an orphan, with an endless capacity for dissembling. Now she is all worry and apprehension and propriety.” (8). It is important, at this point, to notice several things: first of all, that she is described as “striking beautiful”; secondly, that she is not part of a nuclear family – she is an orphan and it is her uncle who takes care of her and with whom she lives –; finally, that she has a special ability for concealing her true feelings. These three characteristics are all specific to the femme fatale, who is always presented as an amazingly beautiful woman, more often than not devoid of a family, and always able of hiding what she really feels or thinks. It is also important to notice that the two words that are highlighted by the author in this brief introduction are, in fact, beautiful and dissembling. Both of them are preceded by adjectives that intensify their meaning: striking and endless. These two characteristics, then, are going to be the main features that Abigail will embody throughout the play and the basic tools she will employ in order to achieve what she wants. Furthermore, it is also indicated that “Now she is all worry, apprehension and propriety.” (8), words that signify innocence, especially when applying them to a seventeen-year-old girl living in Salem

during the spring of year 1962. Those signs of innocence are going to be used by Abigail constantly throughout the play, in order to build herself a good reputation and to gain the confidence of the townspeople. In this same introduction, the audience also learns that Abigail has a bad reputation in town. We are informed that Elizabeth Proctor rarely goes to church because she does not want to “sit so close to something soiled.” (11), and that Parris is worried about the fact that, even though Abigail says that Elizabeth is a “cold, snivelling woman” (11), no one else in the town has called for her service: “it has troubled me that you are now seven month out of their house, and in all this time no other family has ever called for your service.” (11). There is plenty of information about Abigail’s character and, especially, about her attitude at the beginning of the play for the audience to start noticing that she is not just any ordinary girl. Gill Plain states that “If you cannot tell your femme fatale from your virginal innocent, you’re likely to be in serious trouble.” (2001:31), and this idea is going to be central to the whole play. Because the members of the Puritan community in which the action of the play takes place are not able to distinguish the femme fatale from the virginal innocent in Abigail Williams and in her cohort, the community finds itself in deep trouble, unable to display rationality and order in the middle of the chaos that has been created by a seventeen-year-old girl who, among Puritan standards, represents the lowest rung in the social ladder. Abigail has no power or prestige whatsoever at the beginning of the play. Moreover, the audience has already found out, as stated before, that she is being accused by different members of the community on the grounds that she is “soiled,” or as Abigail describes it, that her name is being blackened by respected Puritans such as Elizabeth Proctor, rumours that even her uncle Parris finds difficult to silence, and that make him doubt to what extent Abigail is as innocent as she appears to be. However, the fear of witchcraft in town, together with the greed for power and money that certain members have within the society are enough, not just for all these facts to fall into oblivion but, also, to provide Abigail with the necessary tools to forge her own path into a “goddess-like” status, as Elizabeth soon notices: “She speak of Abigail, and I thought she were a saint, to hear her. Abigail brings the other girls into the court, and where she walks the crowd will part like the sea for Israel.” (50). From being a child with no voice or opinion in Salem, she suddenly becomes God’s instrument, someone with enough power to signal people with her finger and make them hang, no matter how respected or important they have previously been within the society, to the point that she even has the courage to defy the judges when her reputation is questioned:

*Danforth, blanched, in horror, turning to Abigail:* You deny every scrap and title of this?

*Abigail:* If I must answer that, I will leave and I will not come back again!

*Danforth seems unsteady*

....

Abigail, *stepping out to Danforth*: What look do you give me? *Danforth cannot speak*. I'll not have such looks. *She turns and starts for the door*. (103)

The descriptions of Abigail Williams as an apparently pure, innocent girl are many throughout *The Crucible*. Abigail is, however, in fact, quite the opposite and always in full control of every single situation she encounters, to the point that she is capable of making use of the so-called female weapons in order to appeal the heart and comprehension of the men she wants to convince. For instance, when Abigail is being questioned by Parris on what happened the night she was found, together with a group of girls and the slave Tituba, in the middle of the forest, her attitude is depicted in the following manner: "Abigail lowers her eyes... (10), "...she lowers her eyes" (10). "...Innocently." (10). Similar descriptions of femme fatales abound in hard-boiled detective fiction, and their attitudes are globally explained by Hammett's Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* as "Schoolgirl manner...Stammering and blushing and all that" (2003:53). A schoolgirl manner that, nevertheless, has proved successful throughout the history of the femme fatale, that has enough power to make a man forget his code of honour and, even more, to make him die. If we analyse, once again, the description that Miller offers of Abigail at the beginning of the play, and we take it into account together with general descriptions of femme fatales, we will find out that the similarities between the first and the second are many. Femme fatales are always described as beautiful in hard-boiled fiction: in *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe views the woman at Geiger's place as someone "with enough sex appeal to stampede a businessmen's lunch" (1993:23). Apart from this, it is also important to notice the incredible easiness with which Abigail's temperament changes depending on the situation she is facing at a particular moment. For instance, during her conversation with John Proctor at the beginning of the play, she first appears "absorbing his presence, wide-eyed" (20), with a "confidential, wicked air" (20), and "tauntingly" (20), but as soon as Proctor tries to tell her that their affair is over, she gets angry with him and shows her real face: "now beginning to anger – she can't believe it." (21). She is able, however, to soften and return to her schoolgirl manner when John Proctor concedes that he "may have looked up" (22). It is at that moment when she starts crying and when she "clutches him desperately" (22). The whole conversation is a long ebb and flow that ends up with Proctor finally recurring to physical threatening: "Do you look for whippin'?" (22).

Also important to notice is Abigail's lack of sexual repression throughout the play. Her attitude towards sex and her bluntness when referring to it has special relevance when taking into account the society in which she has been

raised and from which she is part: a Puritan community where desire – sexual or other – is synonymous of guilt and associated to the Devil and to witchcraft, signifying death for those involved in the transgression of the rules that govern Salem. It is especially interesting to notice what Wendy Schissel notes, the fact that a “seventeen-year-old girl, raised in the household of a Puritan minister can have the knowledge of how to seduce a man” (1994:462). Abigail has no problem, in fact, to approach Proctor in an overtly sexual manner and in openly speaking about her sexual desire for him, shocking an audience that is expecting from her a completely different behaviour, one that corresponds to a girl of her age in such a repressive society as is Salem. Moreover, Abigail is sure that Proctor also feels that same desire for her and does not hesitate to tell him:

I know how you clutched my back behind your house and sweated like a stallion whenever I come near! Or did I dream that? It's she you put me out, you cannot pretend it were you. I saw your face when she put me out, and you loved me then and you do now! (21)

Abigail constantly tempts John Proctor with her body and with her bold words, believing it is him who has opened her eyes to another reality, to the knowledge of sexual pleasure, a pleasure that could be shared by both of them, together, if it was not for the presence of Elizabeth, John's wife, who is seen by Abigail as the sole interference in their love, as she clearly indicates when approaching Proctor in Act One, “I look for John Proctor that took me from my sleep and put knowledge in my heart!... And now you bid me tear the light out of my eyes? ... You loved me, John Proctor, and whatever sin it is, you love me yet!” (102). Although in hard-boiled fiction (and by extension, in film noir), the femme fatale rarely desires to get married to the detective and rather desires passionate sex with him without additional complications, her attitude towards the sleuth resembles that of Abigail towards Proctor. In fact, in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, when Sam Spade, the private eye, has finally decided to give up his sexual relationship with Brigid O'Shaughnessy, his client, one of the main characters in the novel – and also a femme fatale – and to turn her into the authorities, Brigid quickly turns to her well-known female weapons in order to try change Spade's mind: “She put her face up to his face. Her mouth was slightly open with lips a little thrust out... She put her arms around him and came into his arms” (2003:211). Brigid is convinced, the same Abigail is with John, of Spade's love for her, which just makes it more surprising for her to find out that Sam is quite capable of betraying her: “But-but Sam, you can't! Not after what we've been to each other. You can't!” (207). The same surprised attitude can be found in Abigail the night she secretly meets Proctor in Act Two, Scene Two, when he warns her to either free his wife or see the consequences of her actions if she refuses to do as told:

Proctor: If you do not free my wife tomorrow, I am set and bound to ruin you, Abby.

Abigail, her voice small, astonished: How – ruin me? (142)

The femme fatale has a unique ability to sexually express herself without shyness or remorse. Her passion, emotion and intensity are felt from the very moment in which she is introduced to the reader – in the case of the detective novel – or to the audience – in the case of film noir -. “She is put forward as an archetype of innocent female desirability. She is dangerous, and yet she is perfect.”<sup>132</sup> The same thing happens with Abigail Williams in *The Crucible*. The audience can feel the intensity of the sexually charged atmosphere the moment John Proctor and Abigail meet at Betty’s bedroom, to the extent that the author indicates that Abigail’s “concentrated desire destroys her smile” (21). However, it is that same boldness Abigail has in expressing her sexual desire and not repressing it like the rest of Salem’s inhabitants, what makes her attractive both to John Proctor and to the audience. Although she has no morals and will do anything to achieve what she wants, which makes her a despicable character, the fact that she cannot conceal her desire for Proctor, a married and respected man, is one of the reasons why Proctor still finds himself attracted to her: “Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I’ll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind. We never touched, Abby” (22). Proctor is, however, willing to leave all that has to do with his previous affair with Abigail Williams behind him. He feels that everything is over, wants to do things right and to be forgiven by his wife Elizabeth, who has not yet forgiven him for his betrayal. Abigail, on the other hand, does not have that feeling of closure because “there’s a promise made in every bed” (58) and knows that the only way to possess John Proctor is that Elizabeth, his wife, dies. In that way, Proctor and Abigail will be free and able to get married, something of which Elizabeth is aware of and of which she informs John who, although never recognizing it, knows that what his wife is telling him is perfectly true and that that is, essentially, what Abigail desires:

Elizabeth: Spoke or silent, a promise is surely made. And she may dote on it now – I am sure she does – and thinks to kill me, then to take my place.

*Proctor’s anger is rising; he cannot speak.*

Elizabeth: It is her dearest hope, John, I know it ... She thinks to take my place.

Proctor: She cannot think it! *He knows it is true.* (58)

<sup>132</sup> [http://everything2.com/?node\\_id=1154198](http://everything2.com/?node_id=1154198)

Abigail is “the consummate seductress; the witchcraft hysteria in the play originates in her carnal lust for Proctor” (Schissel 1994:462). She represents the repressed desires that all Puritans have, but she is the only one that does not suppress them. Her affair with Proctor gives her a knowledge that others do not possess. John has not only opened her eyes to the pleasures of sexual involvement, but also to the flaws and hypocrisy of the townspeople: “And then you burned my ignorance away. As bare as some December tree I saw them all – walking like saints to church, running to feed the sick, and hypocrites in their hearts!” (141). This knowledge is what makes Abigail powerful in the eyes of the Puritans. She is certain of the fact that declaring witchcraft upon certain members of the community will provide her with instant power and recognition because of the internal grudges that many people hold against others. Once she has enough power and has gained credibility and respect, not just from Salem’s inhabitants but also from the judges of the court, she can execute her well-plotted plan against Elizabeth. Thus, she first accuses people that have no influence or respect within the community: first Tituba, the slave from Barbados that works for Parris, and then Sarah Good, Goody Osburn – two local outcasts – and Bridget Bishop, “I danced for the Devil; I saw him; I wrote in his book; I go back to Jesus; I kiss His hand. I saw Sarah Good with the Devil! I saw Goody Osburn with the Devil! I saw Bridget Bishop with the Devil” (45). Abigail’s bad reputation is soon forgotten by everyone and she is suddenly seen as an instrument of God. Wherever Abigail’s finger points, there sure will be death and problems, the same kind of problems Marlowe instantly notices when he is introduced to Vivian Sternwood, one of the femme fatales in *The Big Sleep*, and whom he describes in the following manner: “She was worth a stare. She was trouble” (1993:17).

Abigail is trouble mainly for two reasons, which are linked to the description that Arthur Miller does of her when she is introduced at the beginning of the play. On the first hand, she is trouble because of her striking beauty – she is worth a stare – of which she is fully aware; on the second hand, she is trouble because of her ability to conceal what she thinks from others. For instance, when she is questioned by Parris on what she did in the forest with the rest of the girls, she swears, knowing she is not saying the truth, and tells him that they were just dancing and that that was all: “There is nothin’ more. I swear it, uncle” (11). Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* possesses that same ability of concealment. In fact, when Sam Spade discovers that the reasons why she went to request his services as a detective were false and claims his right to know the truth: ““You aren’t,” he asked as he sat down, “exactly the sort of person you pretend to be, are you?”” (2003:53), she just tells him another lie, which is substituted by new ones every time she is discovered by the detective: “That – that story I told you yesterday was all – a story” (30). Abigail knows what dangers she might face if her incursion in the forest finally



gets to be linked to witchcraft or to the Devil – actions that in Salem are punished with death – and so, makes use of the very flaws and fears of her community in order to, on the one hand, free herself from possible accusations that may lead her to death (self-preservation) and, on the other, to achieve status and recognition – and, possibly, Proctor’s heart, whose unrequited love she desires more as a trophy than as anything else. By declaring witchcraft upon certain members of the community she, thus, shifts the attention away from her and places herself in a position of power. Once she has hold of that power, she is able to declare witchcraft upon respected members of the community such as Rebecca Nurse, Martha Corey, or her true rival, Elizabeth Proctor. Her ultimate desire is to see Elizabeth hanging, so she is able to marry John Proctor. That last part of her plan is carried out at the end of Act Two, when she accuses Elizabeth on the ground that she has physically attacked her, practising voodoo on a doll – stabbing a needle in a poppet – which represents Abigail herself:

*Cheever, wide-eyed, trembling:* The girl, the Williams girl, Abigail Williams, sir. She sat to dinner in Reverend Parris’s house tonight, and without a word nor warnin’ she falls to the floor. Like a struck beast, he says, and screamed a scream that a bull would weep to hear. And he goes to save her, and, stuck two inches in the flesh of her belly, he draw a needle out. And demandin’ of her how she come to be so stabbed she – *to Proctor now* – testify it were your wife’s familiar spirit pushed it in.” (71)

Because Abigail is aware that she alone will not have enough power to convince Salem’s inhabitants, as well as the judges, of the rightfulness of convicting people with such authority as that of Elizabeth Proctor or Rebecca Nurse, she looks for additional aid, basically relying on two sources. On the one hand, she seeks help in the rest of the girls, whom she does not doubt to threaten in order to execute her plan: “Let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word, about the other things, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you” (19); on the other hand, she is capable of self-inducing injuries in her body, in order to provide the judges and townspeople with visual proof that, added to the hysteria that Abigail and her cohort provoke when entering the court create, leads everyone to believe that witchcraft must really be the cause of such disturbances. The moment Abigail feels she has enough authority, she is in a position to threat the other girls to continue with the pretence of witchcraft to which they had adhere at the beginning, being it then just an irrational act of self-preservation, and to force them to aid her in the plan she has so carefully and coldly plotted:

Betty: You drank blood, Abby! You didn’t tell him that!

Abigail: Betty, you never say that again! You will never-

Betty: You did, you did! You drank a charm to kill John Proctor's wife! You drank a charm to kill Goody Proctor!

Abigail, *smashes her across the face*: Shut it! Now shut it! (18)

The girls know, the same Abigail does, that if they refuse to help her, they may also be themselves accused of witchcraft, and so, have no possibility of going back on their tracks or refusing to do what Abigail expects from them. Two important things must be noticed in this quote, which takes place early in the play: on the one hand, that Abigail has already attempted once to kill Elizabeth in order to gain John Proctor's heart and that the attempt was done by drinking blood, something that links her to the succubus – the spirit that gets into men's houses and engages in sexual activity with them - or the female vampire -; on the other hand, that this is the first time that Abigail threatens someone, and that she does, not only through verbal violence, but also through physical violence. She threatens Betty, bidding her to say nothing about their secret doings in the forest, by smashing her across the face and then by shouting at her. This is the first time we see Abigail displaying violence with the other girls, something that will continue happening throughout the play. Everyone, from the girls to Parris and the judges – especially Danforth – are pawns in the hands of Abigail Williams, the unstoppable queen who will do whatever is needed to achieve what she desires, and what she desires has a name: John Proctor.

Although in the hard-boiled detective novel it is usually the femme fatale the one who is killed or given into the police at the end of the book, in *The Crucible* it is John Proctor the one who is hanged. However, this should not lead the audience to confusion. John Proctor dies but his integrity is saved. In fact, it is when death is certain for him that his sins – his affair with Abigail, his attitude towards Elizabeth – are definitely forgiven both by the audience and by his wife. Proctor's code of honour, like Marlowe's or Spade's is preserved at the end of the play thus, in a way, reinforcing order and returning this order to Salem. It is his sacrifice what makes of John Proctor a hero and the only possible way in which Abigail can finally be doubly punished for her actions for, on the one hand, she is the one who provokes John's death, the sole object of her desire and the main reason why she had plotted her plan and, on the other hand, because her authority dies with Proctor's death. Abigail runs away from Salem because that is the only option she has left and "rumours has it that she became a prostitute" (135). Abigail's power and attractiveness are left to nothing more than sexual selling. "Miller's statement of Abigail's fate resounds with implicit forgiveness of the man who is unwittingly tempted by a fatal female, a conniving witch" (Schissel 1994:463). Once John Proctor has been hanged, there is no place for Abigail in the rigid, repressive society of Salem,

not more than there is for the femme fatale in the American society of hard-boiled detective fiction once the sleuth has restored order to the city.

Abigail Williams is thus, similar to traditional femme fatales of hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir in her transgression of sexual desire and in her desire for power. She is willing to risk everything, including others lives in order to achieve what she wants, in the same way the femme fatale is willing to risk her life and kill others to achieve sexual rewards or money. In the very end, both serve for the same purpose: a justification for the disruption of order, which must be restored to society by the detective, in the case of hard-boiled fiction and film noir, or by John Proctor in the case of *The Crucible*. Ultimately, the representatives of patriarchal tradition, the common men of the American dream, will not betray their personal code of honour, but rather reinforce their status quo through the repression of any behaviour that might be understood as transgressive or linked to the disruption or long-term established masculine boundaries.

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## EL QUIJOTE EN *THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP*

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El *Quijote* was one of Dickens' first readings which impressed the author. So, we try to find the possible similarities between el *Quijote* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the fourth novel written by the author.

Anyway, we connect the two novels studying the narrators, the structure and the autobiographical aspects. We see, also, the possible connections between the main characters in both novels. We study these characters referring to their relationship between fancy/reality, the aspects of the picaresque novel, fairy tales and finally the authors' attitudes when their characters are faced with death.

At last, we think it is possible to say that Dickens remembered el *Quijote* when he wrote *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

*The Old Curiosity Shop* fue la cuarta novela escrita por Charles Dickens. Esta obra la publicó entre 1840-1841 y la vendió mejor que sus novelas anteriores. En realidad, *The Old Curiosity Shop* alcanzó tanto éxito que consolidó la fama del autor. Se llegaron a vender cien mil ejemplares a la semana (Schlicke 1999:422).

Vemos pues, que el primer capítulo de este relato salió a la luz en el cuarto número de *Master Humphrey's Clock*, ya que el autor se encontraba insatisfecho por el carácter inconexo de la revista. Dickens sentía necesidad de escribir una historia nueva y así se lo explicó a su amigo John Forster: "The first chapter of this tale appeared in the fourth number of Master Humphrey's Clock, when I had already been made uneasy by the desultory character of that work, and when, I believe, my readers had thoroughly participated in the feeling. The commencement of a story was a great satisfaction to me, and I had reason to believe that my readers participated in this feeling too" (Forster 1966:118).

A partir de este momento el novelista compuso la historia fácilmente, con rapidez, en una época en la que parecía iba a estallar una guerra civil: La reina Victoria acababa de subir al trono, era joven, e inexperta; el partido *whig* no era capaz de consolidarse en el poder y la Ley de Reforma que promulgó en 1832 originó protestas; asimismo, había una controversia religiosa a causa de las nuevas teorías que se interesaban por las condiciones de trabajo en las fábricas y

las minas. Por si esto fuera poco, la Nueva Ley de los Pobres originó una oposición, todo ello motivo de la inseguridad que existía y el presentimiento de una revolución, como se muestra en el capítulo cuarenta y cinco de la novela. Aquí Dickens evidencia las revueltas provocadas por los cartistas en 1840: Estos, violentos y revolucionarios precipitaron una oleada de levantamientos que fueron eficazmente sofocados por las autoridades.

Por su parte, la época de Cervantes es tránsito de un siglo a otro, del reinado de Felipe II a Felipe III. El novelista español vivió durante años en los que se sucedieron la hegemonía y la decadencia políticas, el belicismo y el pacifismo, culturalmente el Renacimiento y el Barroco.

La sociedad española ofrecía un doble escenario: En el primero se puede incluir la lucha contra los judíos y los judaizantes. En el segundo se agrupaban los simpatizantes a ambos, que llegaban a defenderles incluso con actividades organizadas.

Coinciden ambos autores en que vivieron años difíciles en sus países respectivos y pretendieron dar un sentido moral a sus obras.

Así pues, Dickens en *The Old Curiosity Shop* sigue la tradición de sus primeras novelas. El autor estaba obsesionado con la idea del niño abandonado, circunstancia que él mismo había experimentado. De ahí que este problema sea el tema repetitivo de sus obras, pues Dickens estaba obcecado con su infancia.

Por ello merece tenerse en cuenta que, al ser el *Quijote* una de sus primeras lecturas y dejarle huella, la historia de *Little Nell* es posible tenga algunos aspectos en común con las aventuras de Don Quijote y Sancho.

En primer lugar al estudiar la novela nos encontramos con que los narradores de ambas obras son personajes ficticios que Cervantes y Dickens utilizan como pretexto para exponer sus respectivas ideas. Sobre el narrador del *Quijote*, Vladimir Nabokov dice: “Finge Cervantes que la fortuna le ayudó, y que en el mercado de Toledo se tropezó con un manuscrito escrito en árabe en varios cartapacios. Su autor era un morisco que Cervantes se inventa de pies a turbante, Cide Hamete Benengeli, historiador arábigo como se define en la portada. A través de esta máscara de seda hablará Cervantes” (Nabokov 2004:121).

En la novela inglesa Mr. Humphrey, que resulta ser tío-abuelo de la protagonista, parece ser el autor de *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Robert Tracy subraya que Dickens concede a Mr Humphrey todas sus facultades humorísticas, melodramáticas y sentimentales como autor de la obra” (Tracy 2001:29).

Después observamos, al igual que en otras novelas de Dickens, como *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* o *Great Expectations* que la protagonista, esta vez una niña llamada Nell, huye de su casa y de la tienda de antigüedades sin que nadie la vea. En esta ocasión la niña sale de madrugada acompañando a su abuelo, un anciano arruinado por su afición al juego, que tiene aspiraciones de convertir a su nieta en una señorita del siglo XIX:

“It was the beginning of a day in June; the deep blue sky unsullied by a cloud, and teeming with brilliant light. ... The old man and the child passed on through the glad silence, elate with hope and pleasure. They were alone together once again; every object was bright and fresh; nothing reminded them, otherwise than by contrast, of the monotony and constraint they had left behind.” (Dickens 1840: I, XII, 103)<sup>133</sup>

Como puede verse, Dickens presenta el motivo de huida de la misma manera que lo había hecho Cervantes anteriormente en el *Quijote*. El hidalgo se marcha de su casa y se pone en camino pensando que, transformado en caballero andante, va a poder arreglar el mundo que le rodea: “Y así, sin dar parte á persona alguna de su intención y sin que nadie le viese, una mañana, antes del día, que era uno de los calurosos del mes de Julio, se armó de todas sus armas, subió sobre Rocinante, puesta su mal compuesta celada, embrazó su adarga, tomó su lanza, y por la puerta falsa de un corral, salió al campo, con grandísimo contento y alborozo de ver con cuánta facilidad había dado principio á su buen deseo” (*EQ* I, II, 68-69)<sup>134</sup>.

Partiendo de esta perspectiva, es obvio que hay un paralelismo en la estructura de las dos novelas ya que unos y otros protagonistas van sin rumbo, se rigen por la casualidad, y se cruzan con todo tipo de gente. En realidad, los autores se sirven de este medio para reflejar el modo de vida y la sociedad de su tiempo respectivamente.

A la luz de estos antecedentes, nos referiremos a los rasgos autobiográficos que existen en ambas novelas y relacionaremos al *Quijote* con *The Old Curiosity Shop* a través de los contrastes fantasía/realidad para buscar las rasgos comunes que se pueden obtener de los personajes principales, contemplándolos dentro de las características de la picaresca y de los cuentos de hadas, así como su postura frente a la muerte.

Con respecto a los RASGOS AUTOBIOGRÁFICOS, encontramos que Cervantes y Dickens exponen escenas relacionadas con su pasado para mostrar que había muchas víctimas inocentes por causas que consideran injustas.

<sup>133</sup> Mencionaremos este libro con las siglas *OCS*, capítulo y página.

<sup>134</sup> Citaremos el *Quijote* con las siglas *EQ*, tomo, capítulo y página, teniendo en cuenta que los cuatro primeros volúmenes corresponden a la parte primera y los cuatro últimos a la parte segunda de la novela.

Así pues, como Cervantes habla directamente al lector detrás de la figura de Cide Hamete Benengeli, Dominique Aubier señala que es una novela autobiográfica disimulada, cuenta una aventura espiritual cuyos resultados se atribuyen a una autoridad más antigua, la del escritor árabe Cide Hamete Benengeli: Don Quijote contiene la biografía de Cervantes (Aubier 1981:177). Además, esta autora arguye: “Si Cervantes cuenta su biografía mística a través de las aventuras de Don Quijote, dando cuenta de los acontecimientos de su vida y de sus consecuencias sobre el propio pensamiento, al mismo tiempo que de su pensamiento en el estado de acabamiento sintético que le permite la madurez, podemos reducir todo a su persona, con bastantes probabilidades de éxito” (Aubier 1981:177).

Y en cuanto a la novela inglesa, el mismo Dickens indica en una carta dirigida a su amigo J. Forster, fechada el 7 de Enero de 1841, que había terminado la historia de Little Nell el día antes y había recordado a su cuñada: “Nobody will miss her like I shall. It is such a very painful thing to me, that I really cannot express my sorrow. Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it: what the actual doing it will be, god knows. I can’t preach to myself the schoolmaster’s consolation, though I try. Dear Mary died yesterday, when I think of his sad story” (Forster 1966:122). En este sentido Eleanor Graham afirma que el personaje de la niña es una evocación por parte del autor de su cuñada Mary Hogarth, muy joven y guapa: “The character of the child became identified in his imagination with memories of Mary Hogarth, “so young, so beautiful...” (Graham 1962:150).

Asimismo, P. Schlicke interpreta que las aventuras de Little Nell corresponden a la imagen de la juventud del escritor (Schlicke 2002:13), y este razonamiento está de acuerdo con Malcolm Andrews cuando manifiesta que Dickens al escribir la novela se inspiró en su propia experiencia: El autor recordó cuando era un niño de doce años y trabajaba en la fábrica de betún: “For Dickens is drawing heavily on material from the chaotic hinterland of his own childhood experience – puppets, dwarfs, giants,... The Garlands are modelled on the blacking warehouse; and the Marchioness is drawn from the little maid who attended his parents in the Marshalsea prison” (Andrews 1985:19).

De hecho, el novelista inglés parece que improvisó la historia de Little Nell. Dickens no elaboró un planteamiento antes de escribir la obra y por eso repite la idea de *Oliver Twist*, novela en la que establece el contraste de la inocencia angelical del niño sometido a leyes improcedentes con la corrupción de la sociedad que le rodea.

Desde este punto de vista, podemos comparar a los PERSONAJES del *Quijote* con los de la novela inglesa. Así vemos a DON QUIJOTE y a LITTLE



NELL vagando por el campo o la ciudad. El caballero y la niña son dos personajes que parecen de otro mundo: El hidalgo por haberse transformado en un caballero medieval en pleno siglo XVII y la niña por su candidez y honradez. Pensamos que la figura de Little Nell, por su perfección, podía corresponder a la imagen que tiene Don Quijote de Dulcinea cuando la define: “¡Oh mi señora Dulcinea del Toboso, extremo de toda hermosura, fin remate de la discreción, archivo del mejor donaire, depósito de la honestidad, y, ultimadamente, la idea de todo lo provechoso, honesto y deleitable que hay en el mundo!” (EQ IV, XLIII, 131-132).

Don Quijote y Little Nell son personajes idealizados pero que se asemejan a seres reales: Sufren y tienen ilusiones. Coinciden ambos en que se recuperan pronto de sus fracasos y tienen ánimo. Vemos, pues, que a Don Quijote, derrotado por el caballero de la Blanca Luna, al regresar a su aldea le gustaría convertirse en pastor y dice a Sancho: “... Querría ¡Oh Sancho! Que nos convirtiésemos en pastores, siquiera el tiempo que tengo de estar recogido. Yo compraré algunas ovejas, y todas las demás cosas que al pastoral ejercicio son necesarios, y llamándome yo *el pastor Quijotiz*, y tú *el pastor Pancino*, nos andaremos por los montes, por las selvas y por los prados, cantando aquí, ... “ (EQ VIII, LXVII, 224-225).

Paralelamente, cuando Little Nell y su abuelo se quedan sin dinero, a la niña no le asusta oír decir a su abuelo que se han arruinado y se ilusiona con la posibilidad de convertirse en pedigüños:

“I am ruined and worse, far worse than that – have ruined thee, for whom I ventured all. If we are beggars-!”

“What if we are? Said the child boldly. “Let us be beggars, and be happy.”

“Beggars – and happy! Said the old man. “Poor child!” (OCS IX, 71).

También los autores enlazan a estos personajes con los paisajes y les sumergen en variedad de escenas debido a su movilidad: Don Quijote y Little Nell atraviesan bosques, pasan por márgenes de ríos, llegan a pueblos. Cervantes y Dickens introducen al lector en estas escenas a través de adjetivos, olores, paisajes que parece se están viendo y no resultan hechos extraños; las horas pasan deprisa y el tiempo también contribuye a proporcionar esa idea de realidad. Por ejemplo, en la novela española Don Quijote dice a Sancho: “Sancho amigo, la noche se nos va entrando á más andar, y con más escuridad de la que habíamos menester para alcanzar á ver con el día al Toboso” (EQ V, VIII, 146).

A su vez en *The Old Curiosity Shop*, podemos apreciar que también el tiempo pasa rápido, así Nell, esperando a su abuelo por la tarde, cuenta los minutos hasta que llega bien entrada la noche: “That evening, as she had

dreaded, her grandfather stole away, and did not come back until the night was far spent. Worn out as she was, and fatigued in mind and body, she sat up alone, counting the minutes, until he returned-" (OCS XXXII, 245).

EL ABUELO de Nell es otro personaje con algunas características del caballero español ya que su obsesión por el juego viene a ser una especie de locura y la ambición de convertir a su nieta en una señorita educada y rica le trastorna: Así pues, le oímos decir: "She shall be rich one of these days, and a fine lady" (OCS I, 15).

Como consecuencia de estas ambiciones encontramos a los dos personajes en situaciones parecidas. Don Quijote, según indica José A. Maravall: "Arrastrado por un afán de acción y eficacia, por el anhelo de construir su entorno, no se conforma con hablar, sino que se entrega a obrar según su proyecto" (Maravall 1976: 150). Don Quijote, ante lo que cree va a ser una hazaña caballeresca, se enaltece y se lanza a pelear sin escuchar las advertencias de su escudero.

Por su parte, el abuelo de Nell se transforma cuando oye que alguien está jugando a las cartas y su estado de ánimo llega a asustar a su nieta: "The child saw with astonishment and alarm that his whole appearance had undergone a complete change. His face was flushed and eager, his eyes were strained, his teeth set, his breath came short and thick, and the hand he laid upon her arm trembled so violently that she shook beneath its grasp" (OCS XXIX, 226).

Del mismo modo, sus obsesiones por los libros de caballerías y el juego les llevan a desastres inevitables que les hacen cambiar y recuperan el juicio. Don Quijote antes de morir se da cuenta de que ya no es Don Quijote de la Mancha y exclama: "Dadme albricias, buenos señores, de que ya no soy don Quijote de la Mancha, sino Alonso Quijano, á quien mis costumbres me dieron renombre de Bueno. Ya soy enemigo de Amadís de Gaula y de toda la caterva de su linaje; ya me son odiosas todas las historias profanas de la andante caballería" (EQ VIII, LXXIV, 322-323).

En la novela inglesa, el anciano al ver a su nieta enferma ya no la deja sola, cuida de ella constantemente y se preocupa por su salud: "She needs rest," said the old man, patting her cheek; "too pale -too pale. She is not like what she was" (OCS LIV, 410).

Esta relación entre abuelo y nieta también nos lleva a compararla con la coyuntura del caballero y el escudero pero en *The Old Curiosity Shop* la figura de SANCHO PANZA la vemos reflejada en otro personaje, DICK SWIVELLER, una de las figuras mejor caracterizadas por Dickens.

Dick Swiveller sigue la línea de Sam Weller en *The Pickwick Papers*, o Mr. Micawber en *David Copperfield*, personajes que por su dejadez en la forma

de vestir, locuacidad y optimismo recuerdan al escudero de Don Quijote, cuya personalidad atrajo en gran manera al escritor inglés. El mismo Dickens lo manifestó en el prólogo de *Nicholas Nickleby*: “I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools, when I was a not very robust child sitting in by - places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panaza; ...” (Dickens 1839:48).

Esto explica que Dickens presente a Dick Swiveller en el segundo capítulo de la novela con ironía y abandonado en su forma de vestir. El narrador comenta que su indumentaria estaba tan descuidada que parecía había dormido con ella: “His attire was not, as he had himself hinted, remarkable for the nicest arrangement, but was in a state of disorder which strongly induced the idea that he had gone to bed in it” (*OCS* II, 25).

Asimismo, observamos el gusto esencial que Sancho y Dick sienten por la comida y la bebida, por ejemplo el narrador cuenta acerca del escudero: “Al levantarse dió un tiento á la bota, y hallóla algo más flaca que la noche antes, y afligiósele el corazón, por parecerle que no llevaban camino de remediar tan presto su falta” (*EQ* I, VIII, 198).

De la misma manera se nos explica que Dick Swiveller bebe también mucho: “Richard Swiveller finished the rosy and applied himself to the composition of another glassful, in which, after tasting it with great relish, he proposed a toast to an imaginary company” (*OCS* VII, 61).

También en su forma de hablar ambos personajes demuestran que son alegres y optimistas. Desde este punto de mira, observamos que el escudero dice a su mujer: “Te enviaré dineros que no me faltarán, pues nunca falta quien se los preste á los gobernadores cuando no los tienen...” (*EQ* V, V, 112).

Y con la misma actitud Dick Swiveller dice a su amigo Fred: “Fred,” said Mr Swiveller, remember the once popular melody of “Begone dull care”; fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship; and pass the rosy wine” (*OCS* VII, 60).

El escudero y Dick tienen gran sentido del humor y son tan locuaces que la personalidad de ambos personajes se trasluce a través de sus diálogos, mediante los cuales nos descubren sus pensamientos. Son pláticas coloquiales en las que Sancho y Dick exteriorizan su fuerza interior. Significativamente, Sancho Panza y Dick Swiveller se crean un mundo a su alrededor para satisfacer su propio deseo y confunden a veces la realidad con lo que anhelan. Por ejemplo el escudero ansía llegar a ser gobernador de una ínsula y se cree todo lo que le dice Don Quijote aceptando su fantasía: “A la mano de Dios –dijo Sancho–; yo lo creo todo así como vuestra merced lo dice” (*EQ* I, VIII, 195).

Por su parte, Dick sueña despierto, reconoce su fantasía pero vive de ella. Con este propósito describe a Sophy Wackles, una joven de la que esta enamorado como la mujer más bella y encantadora: “She’s all my fancy painted her, sir, that’s what she is,” said Mr Swiveller, taking a long pull at “the rosy” and looking gravely at his friend. “She is lovely, she’s divine. You know her” (OCS VII, 65).

Ahora bien, Cervantes y Dickens con gran capacidad de trabajo tuvieron que hacer frente en la vida a todo tipo de contrariedades y engaños por lo que en estas novelas descubrimos, también, ciertas características que se pueden incluir dentro de la tradición PICARESCA. Ambos escritores emplean esta técnica como excusa para expresar sus ideas y sentimientos: Cervantes haciendo una sátira de los libros de caballerías y Dickens componiendo una alegoría en la peregrinación de sus personajes de este mundo al siguiente. El *Quijote* y *The Old Curiosity Shop* presentan dos protagonistas de los cuales uno es engañado por el otro en los diversos episodios en que se encuentran. Así Sancho Panza, escudero fiel de Don Quijote, basándose en las ilusiones de su amo, le engaña varias veces; Sancho Panza es un bribón que no se siente responsable de farsa: Por ejemplo, llega a convertirse en encantador de su señora Dulcinea. El escudero transforma a tres aldeanas montadas en tres pollinas que ve venir del Toboso por un camino, haciendo creer al caballero que se trata de su amada y sus doncellas, y para ello las describe: “Sus doncellas y ella todas son un ascua de oro, todas mazorcas de perlas, todas son diamantes, todas rubies, todas telas de brocado de más de diez altos; los cabellos, sueltos por las espaldas, que son otros tantos rayos del sol que andan jugando con el viento; y, sobre todo, vienen á caballo sobre tres cananeas remendadas, que no hay más que ver” (EQ V, X, 186-187).

De esta forma Sancho Panza engaña a Don Quijote, que se siente decepcionado y triste por el aspecto y toscos modales de la aldeana.

No cabe duda, pues, que a partir de este momento la preocupación de Don Quijote será la de desencantar a Dulcinea, actitud que se aprecia en el episodio de la cueva de Montesinos, donde el escudero se atreve a tratar a su amo de mentiroso. Don Quijote, autoencantado, cuenta a Sancho y a un joven estudiante haber visto a Dulcinea y a otras dos doncellas que seguían convertidas en pueblerinas: “Conocíla –respondió don Quijote- en que trae los mismos vestidos que traía cuando tú me la mostraste. Háblala, pero no me respondió palabra, antes me volvió las espaldas, y se fue huyendo con tanta priesa, que no la alcanzara una jara” (EQ VI, XXIII, 108)

Respecto a *The Old Curiosity Shop* la relación entre Little Nell y su abuelo está cambiada. Ella, una niña pequeña, tiene que cuidar a su abuelo, un anciano honrado que se ha arruinado por su afición al juego. El juego estaba

considerado en aquella época como el mayor vicio; no sólo era un mal moral sino que también tenía implicaciones sociales incluso a nivel nacional. Las clases sociales altas sentaron un precedente y a finales del siglo XVIII había muchas casas de juego (Schlicke 2002:17).

Little Nell resulta ser la víctima del vicio de su abuelo. Buena prueba de ello es que el anciano llega a robar el dinero a su nieta cuando dormía, pensando que su suerte iba a cambiar: “A figure was there. Yes, she had drawn up the blind to admit the light when it should dawn, and there, between the foot of the bed and the dark casement, it crouched and slunk along, groping its way with noiseless hands, and stealing round the bed. She had no voice to cry for help, no power to move, but lay still, watching it” (*OCS* XXX, 234).

El incidente del robo también entra en relación con los CUENTOS DE HADAS. Cervantes y Dickens presentan la antítesis *ficción/realidad*, pues Don Quijote y Little Nell salen de sus casas sin pensar en el dinero ni en nada que les ponga tristes. Don Quijote intenta transformar el mundo en orden de sus sueños y Little Nell ansía descansar por las noches y tomar el sol y el viento; el emplazamiento rural viene a ser como un sueño. En contraposición con la figura del pícaro hay un paralelismo entre Don Quijote y Little Nell ya que ambos personajes podían ser protagonistas de un cuento de hadas respectivamente: Así, Don Quijote es un noble caballero andante en el siglo XVII y su conducta resulta ser de ejemplaridad ética, siendo el más casto enamorado y el más valiente caballero. Por el contrario, su escudero Sancho Panza, bajo y gordo, es un cobarde mentecato.

En *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Little Nell conduciendo a su abuelo a través de los bosques es la princesa desheredada de los cuentos: La niña exhibe la belleza y bondad perfectas; es un personaje angelical. En cambio Quilp parece la figura del ogro por su aspecto grotesco y su conducta malvada. Ambos novelistas, siguiendo las características de los cuentos de hadas, crean ambientes y escenas de suspense, reproduciendo la confusión y el misterio en las descripciones así como en las narraciones. Por ejemplo en la escena de los batanes, donde Sancho tiembla por no conocer el origen del ruido (*EQ* II, XX) y también en la incógnita de la desaparición del rucio y el posible despiste por parte del escritor: “Antes de haber aparecido el jumento, dice el autor que iba á caballo Sancho en el mismo rucio” (*EQ* V, IV, 87).

Asimismo, en la novela inglesa el abuelo se marcha por las noches dejando sola a su nieta. El autor deja libre la imaginación del lector para que se pregunte sobre la incógnita del proceder del anciano; de hecho, el narrador manifiesta su sorpresa por la conducta del anciano:

“I was surprised to see the child standing patienly by with a cloak upon her arm, and in her hand a hat and stick.